A

Dissertation

on

The Effects of Aliment

on

The Human Constitution

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A

Dissertation on the Effects of Aliment on the Human Constitution

The human system, in common with other animal bodies is a curiously organised structure, consisting of compages of tubular vessels with their contained circulating fluids; tho perhaps of a more exquisite and perfect workmanship, if it be possible for human reason to designate by any characteristic marks; degrees of perfection, in the works of Divine Wisdom.

This body of man, being wonderfully

formed and the most perfectly organized machine, as it came from from the hands of the Divine Architect, was first put in motion, by the impulse of his breath — for we read in the sacred volume — That God breathed into man the breath of life (that is, air) and he became a living soul; The air serving to set the beautiful image in motion. — And the influence of this impulse to action, on the originally formed body, was so powerful, as not only to continue it in exertion, for a length of time; which constitutes what is called life

but also endowed it with a power of communicating a like impulse to other organised bodies, which this animalised body had the power of forming, by the wonderful process of generation — hence the innumerable living beings, that have existed and continue to exist for a time, in their turns; by successive generations, since the creation of the parent stock, tho they must all decay, and run their course, tending ultimately to dissolution. —

As it seems to be a first law of nature that all created matter, should be subject

to continual change and transmutation, and that all organised bodies should in process of time become decomposed, into their first elementary particles, preparatory to their entering into, & forming the constituent parts of others; In this perhaps consists the life of the Universe, if we may be allowed the expression.—

Man being created thus perfect, was placed in a medium, affording the proper quantity of stimuli, to keep the machine in motion, during time, were it not subject to decay from its own action, by slow degrees.—

This gradual waste, to which animated bodies are continually liable, man is capable of counteracting, by other foreign matters which serve to supply the loss to which his system is ~~subject~~. For man, when created was not only endowed with the power of loco-motion, but in an elevated part of his frame there is found an organ more peculiarly and delicately formed, that is capable of ten thousand reflex and complicated motions, which constitute the mind the noblest part of that being said to wear the image of the Creator — "Tissue

of his reasoning powers and other faculties — These are the characteristic and distinctive marks, which rank him so much above other animals.

Man thus animated and endowed, finds himself impelled by intellectual springs, to exert those powers and faculties, given him for the purpose of enjoying life — but soon perceives his powers enfeebled the energy of his understanding diminished and indeed his whole system debilitated by reason of the exhaustion, of the body, as it is continually wasting by degrees and the

powers and

faculties of the mind are in an equal proportion impaired, being intimately connected with the organization of the body, depending on its intercommunications in the substance of the brain.

On reflection and by attentively observing the phenomena that are constantly taking place in his body, Man readily discovers the source from whence this exhaustion and consequent weakness of the powers of his system originate. He observes, an hourly and unceasing waste of his fluids in the different excrementitious matters continually

passing off by the several emunctories of his body — these evacuations tend to exhaust and debilitate the human frame, and teach the necessity there is of replenishing the loss, with other matter to supply the place of what is spent by being thrown off by these various outlets.

~~But~~ In such a state of ignorant of any modes of refurnishing his system, with nutrient matter to sustain its equilibrium man would be but a miserable shortlived creature, rapidly verging to his primitive nothingness, had it not been for a wise provision of the

Divine Creator, in forming his body, in so wonderful a manner, with various organized parts, admirably fitted for receiving and converting foreign substances into a fluid fluid fitted to be united with the circulating mass, and when mixed to be distributed throughout the whole system thro' the medium of this circulating mass and deposited in the different parts, and finally to become constituent parts of his body ~~to subsist~~ to supply the waste it is subject to from the exertion necessary to its existence in an animated state. And scarcely would human reason

be adequate to the regular performance of such requisite duties, if it were not that man as well as other animals, are incited to take in nutrient substances by a painful sensation experienced in an important organ, the stomach, excited in it by a peculiar fluid, secreted by certain glands, and which is poured into the stomach in such a state as to irritate it when empty. it is called the gastric juice and produces the sensation of hunger, to relieve which we are impelled to take food.

The food suitable for man commonly consists

of nutrient substances, which after undergoing the various processes of Mastication, chemical action and chylification, being mixed and diluted with several secreted fluids it finally becomes assimilated with the circulating mass of the system, in the radicals and other vessels that serve to carry the chyle to the blood vessels. —

In this way nourishment is afforded to animal bodies, for the alimentary particles, being deposited in the course of their circulation, in cells &c and forming accretions that supply the loss, the body sustains by

the various secretions and excretions.

After these preliminary observations I proceed to make a few remarks respecting the particular effects of aliment on the human constitution and the manner of affording the body its proper nourishment so as to preserve health and obtain a continuance of life.

The subject of diet is one of the most important, as on its being properly regulated depends in a great measure our enjoyment of health and life, yet in general too little attention is paid to it.

I believe the seeds of more of our diseases, are taken in with our food than in any other way, and that our health is oftener affected by this means, than in any other whatever.

The ill effects of aliment on the human constitution, I do not think is owing so much to a quality of the food as to the quantity. The stomach and even the whole system which sympathizes with it, is capable of accommodating itself to almost any kind of aliment, provided the change be effected gradually. Man can so easily accommodate himself to so many different modes of living

and to feeding on such various and discordant articles of diet that he may be emphatically stiled an omnivorous animal. It is the excessive indulgence in the use of any of these articles which are eaten that proves both detrimental to his health & injurious to his constitution, and brings upon him, pain, disease and death. The ill effects of intemperance, in eating, are not suddenly, so sensibly felt - nor do they destroy so soon, yet more fall victims to their gluttony, than by pestilence, sword or famine. Man is so infatuated as to make the worst use of what was designed as the

greatest blessing. Not even the noxious miasmatic vapours nor the pinching cold, that most bitter and implacable enemy to life, with which we have to contend, in preserving health, are half so destructive as intemperance in eating.

The foundation of most of our ~~diseases~~ complaints are laid in infancy & childhood, by the improper use of food & by far the greatest injury is done to the constitutions of children by it, when given in too great a quantity. It is very easy to conceive what immense mischief, may be done to the tender stomachs of ~~Children~~ the young, when we consider

how delicate & irritable the viscera is, & how quickly it is affected, tho' capable of great extension, by stuffing it with a greater quantity of aliment than can be properly digested. and these injurious effects are not confined to the stomach only, but are propagated to the rest of the system, which sympathises with it. The stomach is disordered by the superabundant aliment, the lax and yielding vessels are distended with crude juices unsuited to the formation of proper fluids to be mixed with the blood, hence the system is oppressed with a load of gross matter

which it is compelled to get rid of by some violent effort; which frequently brings on convulsive action, & this is disease.

Man like other animals is induced to take his food from the impulse of hunger and tho' he is endowed with reasoning faculties by which, we would suppose he might regulate the manner of receiving his aliment; yet with all his boasted superiorly of intellect he commits more errors in this respect than any other animal. I know of no way, in which he appears to abuse his reason so much as he does in regard to the taking

the necessary quantity of nourishment to preserve life with health. How frequently does the Epicurean sacrifice his health, with all its attendant enjoyments, to the gratification of his appetite; for not well pleased with simple food, tho' the rarest products of both the vegetable and animal kingdoms; he is continually inventing new and complicated dishes of the choicest and most delicious articles — still not content to partake of the richest and most gustful viands, in moderate quantity — what Nature craves; he devours, under the

guise of savoury meats, the bane of his health while he is devising every artificial means of increasing & wheedling his appetite that he may have the pleasure of pleasing it. The sense of taste is one of the greatest sources of pleasure, with which we are favoured, when only gratified, as reason & experience dictate, that is when we eat simply, to satisfy hunger and afford nourishment to the body. But not satisfied with the pleasure, Nature has made us capable of enjoying, we are incessantly creating artificial methods of heightening this pleasure first-by creating an artificial

appetite and then ransacking the world, for the means of gratifying these undue desires.

The effect, tho' slow is not a less certain poison, undermining the constitution of the gluttonous eater, who tho sure of being punished for his folly, by train of hagg and diseases constantly attending on intemperate eating still he is drawn away, to his destruction by the alluring feast; or it may be said he eats himself into the grave....

Our food to be conducive to health and continuance of life should be taken in quite moderate quantities, just sufficient to

nourish the body, and the more simple, the better, as in that case we are not so apt to err, with respect to the proper quantity, necessary for our support. If we take too much food, we soon feel oppression and fulness of the stomach, a dull heaviness and slight pain of the head succeeds, indigestion, flatulency, and acid eructations — sometimes nausea and vomiting till the stomach relieves itself, of the oppressive load.

There have been many speculations and disputes among writers on the subject of diet, respecting what ought to constitute

the proper food of the human species, whether man is to be considered as a carnivorous or granivorous animal. Some asserting that he ought to be circumscribed to the vegetable kingdom for the articles of his diet, while others as warmly contend and perhaps with equal propriety that animal food is necessary for his nourishment; and that the whole animal race is to be considered as under the control of his appetite. These speculations are of little moment and only to be regarded as they sometimes do harm by influencing persons to make too sudden changes in their

mode of life, as the refraining, animal and living entirely on vegetable food, or vice versa — which has sometimes produced unpleasant consequences to their health, sometimes proved fatal. The excess in quantity, and sudden change from living on one kind of aliment and substituting in its stead another, may be considered as the principal circumstances to be regarded in the regulating of our diet — so as to prevent ill health. For we may except some few with peculiar idiosyncrasies, who are very singularly affected by certain kinds of food. Some persons cannot take milk, that

now mild and nutrient fluid, without experiencing great pain and distress. Mrs H. informed me She never suffered more excruciating pains than she did after having taken a small quantity of milk — & then have a violent colic excited by one of the most delicious articles of food — honey, yet these articles are in such high esteem as to be characteristic of a favoured land — ordained by Heaven

Some few cannot eat the flesh of particular kinds of animals, while others refuse fish. But there are only a few of the human race who may not partake of every species of

diet; in small quantity and their stomachs will digest it and shortly become so habituated to receive it that they may eat with pleasure and satisfaction. I have myself found it convenient, on removing from one part of the United States to another, where the manner of living was different, to learn to eat that, which at first was quite disgusting and unpalatable but in time, when my taste and stomach becoming familiarized to its use, grew extremely fond of; and what formerly, the very thoughts of eating or food would have almost excited a nausea, by habitis

rendered extremely pleasant. We know from experience that the human constitution is formed to be capable of accommodating itself to almost any mode of living according to the situation and circumstances in which we may be placed by nature or where we may chance to be cast by misfortune, so as to enjoy health.

We find people in different parts of the earth who support life and health most pleasantly and appear equally attached to their country, tho' they live on aliments of very different kinds and of the most

dissimilar properties, taken from the vegetable or animal kingdom. The Northern tribes of Europe and America, are said to live mostly on the rancid oil they extract from fish, which communicates even to their breath such an offensive fator as to sicken their more southern neighbours, who are more delicately; while there are nations in Africa who feed almost exclusively on the mucilage they obtain from the ~~plant~~ Acacia, called Gum arabic. The Hindoos and Chinese eating their rice, while the English and French are more fond of roast,

beef and rich soups. The Native inhabitants of the South sea Islands live chiefly on ripe fruits; which abound more or less in an acid; And the blacks in the West India Islands, are said to fatten on the juice of the cane, during the time they are employed in manufacturing Sugar.

Some Nations seem to be possessed of stomachs adapted to their situation on the globe, formed for digesting substances apparently the most indigestible and unalimentary and extracting thereform nourishment for their bodies. The

The Lapponders make their bread of powdered fish bones and the bark of some trees, and feast on it, perhaps with as good a relish as we do on the finest wheaten loaf. There are instances of many travellers visiting and remaining in their countries where the modes of life are so very diverse, yet they have been able in a short time to accommodate themselves to the customs of their hosts. These circumstances prove the versatility of our constitutions, and that it is not so much the quality of the food we take that is to be regarded as producing

injurious effects as the quantity or the too quick transition from one mode of living or species of diet, to that of another, without giving the stomach time gradually to become acquainted with the newly introduced aliment. We find the functions of the animal economy equally well and regularly carried on, in those who live on those various kinds of food provided they are temperate. But if they indulge to excess the stomach is thereby too much distended and its functions disordered - its powers of digestion weakened - and indigestion, cardialgia

dyspepsia &c are as certainly the consequence of surfeit in the Laplander with his fish & bread as to the more luxurious Frenchman who feasts on his rich soups or the English man who gormandizes his high seasoned dishes of meat.

Many of our most obstinate and afflicting disease might be ~~avoided~~ prevented by a due attention to & properly regulating our diet in the early periods of life. Few children would surfeit themselves with plain and simple food if given to them at proper intervals. Their overeating

is most commonly owing to their appetites being stimulated by rich and high seasoned dishes, as they have not judgement properly to regulate the quantity they indulge to excess, and when ~~the~~ once they have fallen into the habit, it is very difficult to restrain them, within the bounds of moderation. Another mistake many parents fall into, with respect to the food of children, that is they feed them too much on vapid food not sufficiently nourishing, fancying it the most healthy, of which it is requisite for them

to eat large quantities to receive the necessary nourishment, so they require more, ~~than~~ in proportion than persons in middle life, they so distend the stomach that when they come to live on a more nutrient diet they are constantly liable to eat to excess. Children and youth ought to be fed on simple food and as often as the stomach craves it, thus we avoid all temptation to indulge to excess. Many parents and others who have the charge of youth refuse to indulge them with food in the intervals of their meals

and very commonly make them wait till the older part of the family have breakfasted or dined, by which time they become so hungry as to eat by far too much for the powers of the stomach to digest and frequently swallow it with such greediness, as not to masticate it sufficiently, that it is with difficulty digested. Thus embryo diseases ~~are~~ is formed & lies lurking in the system for an opportunity to show ~~itself~~ themselves in future life - & its effects are only to be avoided by living abstemiously, like the wise Canaro.